

Texas A&M University System Response to Request for Information On House Higher Education Committee's Interim Charges

Interim Charge 4: Online Courses

- 1. What are the existing barriers to online learning for students and faculty? What have institutions done to alleviate and eliminate these barriers?***

Among the biggest obstacles is the digital divide, where socioeconomically disadvantaged and underrepresented students disproportionately lack quality access broadband and often even lack the tools necessary for success. We have checked out thousands of hot spots and laptops but the need is significant.

- 2. What information and data is available regarding long-term student success for those taking courses primarily online --both in general and specific to Texas institutions?***

The universities of The Texas A&M University System have robust online academic programming. All 11 of our universities offer complete degree programs online, as well as a multitude of individual courses supporting those degree programs or other programs at the university, comprising approximately 16% of our enrollment.

- 3. With institutions having shifted instruction to online-only in the Spring of 2020 because of the pandemic, what lessons have been learned?***

These students perform well in the online and hybrid environment. We analyze this data from time to time in the context of "Drop/Fail/Withdraw" (DFW) rates for categories of courses. In the most recent analysis (again, FY 2018 data)

- There were 945 courses (undergraduate and graduate) across all A&M System universities that had at least one face-to-face section and at least one online section allowing for direct comparisons of performance.
- There were 342,817 student enrollments in face-to-face course sections, and 63,803 student enrollments in online course sections. That means that approximately 84% of enrollments in these bi-modal courses were in the face-to-face sections. This is comparable to the overall SCH breakdown from the THECB Accountability Portal that shows we had 84% of all SCH across the System generated from face-to-face courses.
- Across the 945 courses in this comparison, the overall DFW rate in face-to-face courses was 13.9%, and the overall DFW rate in online courses was 14.4%.
- Within the major student levels (lower division undergraduate, upper division undergraduate, graduate), the DFW rates were:

<u>Student_Level</u>	<u>InstructionMode</u>	<u>Grade_Rate</u>
Lower_Div	Face-to-Face	17.4%
Lower_Div	Online	17.6%
Upper_Div	Face-to-Face	11.5%
Upper_Div	Online	15.2%
Graduate	Face-to-Face	3.5%

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Graduate	Online	9.0%
Overall	Face-to-Face	13.9%
Overall	Online	14.4%

- The largest percentage point gap is at the graduate level, where 9% of online students received a DFW, whereas 3.5% of face-to-face students received a DFW.
- At the undergraduate level, lower-division courses were practically identical in their DFW rates: 17.4% for face-to-face students and 17.6% for online students.
- In upper-division courses, 11.5% of face-to-face students received a DFW, while 15.2% of online students received a DFW.

4. What are the challenges related to technology, quality, accessibility or other considerations? The Committee is seeking the perspectives of college/university administration, faculty and students.

The Learning Management Services are very expensive. For accessibility we must provide captioning and other supports to be in-keeping with ADA for those hearing impaired. In addition to that cost there are variances in learning styles and some students thrive in that environment while others struggle.

5. Post-pandemic, will the recent shift to online courses lead to expanded online demand and capacity?

This is something we will continue to monitor this fall – it is too early to tell.

6. How can the Legislature address gaps in equity in accessing reliable, affordable Internet access?

This is more of a private sector market issue. The legislature may provide some incentive.

7. What sort of differences in quality are we seeing for online nursing programs without a clinical component versus those that do have one or are done in person?

Our clinical programs do not have an online component.

8. What sort of privacy exists for students utilizing some of the more popular online curriculum packages?

Our Learning Management Systems are password protected and we use DUO for security purposes.

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- 9. Has recently adopted legislation on Open Educational Resources been able to make an impact on the quality of online education yet?***

There is yet to be any measurable impact.

- 10. Do small and rural community colleges have the financial capability to switch to online, as well as in-person, classes, degrees, etc.?***

N/A

- 11. How does the impact of COVID-19 affect the small and rural community college's ability to offer online classes and make other changes to adapt to the pandemic?***

N/A